

Fade Away by EvieSmallwood

Series: [Lost Moments \[6\]](#)

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: F/M, Mileven Is My Life, Wheeler sibling bonding, features hints of both jancy and stancy, i love steve okay, nancy's relationship status: it's complicated, post gate fic, super unbiased, the wheelers are sad, this is super introspective

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Summary:

longing: a yearning desire.

Pain—when struck like this; at the heart of a family—often causes cracks. Cracks that don't fill get bigger. They turn into chasms. Gaping wounds. Scars.

Their pain parallels the other's. Like fissures in a broken window, the pain extends outward, until someone finds a big enough band aid.

Or: Mike and Nancy are hurting.

Fade Away

Author's Note:

- For , [FateChica](#).

The concrete stoop glistens from the last rainfall, reflecting the back porch light which casts everything in a heavy yellow hue; spreading out from his feet over the loose-packed snow. It seems to shimmer, almost—half bathed in the heavy hung moon, silver meeting gold.

Mike breathes out, and then in. He watches his breath fade upward, curling, disappearing.

Like she had; in a flurry of decaying matter. Screaming, so loud it had almost cracked glass, and then gone.

Just like that.

Everyone is acting like it shouldn't hurt so much, but it does. Sometimes it feels like there's a hole in his chest, sucking all of the good into it, leaving only room for nightmares and bad thoughts and anger.

He should have saved her. Could have; he could have just stood up, pulled her back. He promised she'd be safe, and that she could come home with him.

Now she'll never really know what that is, and it sucks.

He bites his numbing lip, hard enough to leave little crescent indentations. His mom has warned him several times to stop it; *if you keep doing that, Michael, you're going to make it bleed.*

He's almost content to stay out here in the cold; to let the freezing air consume him, seep through his clothes and skin and bones, right into his heart. He's content to let the darkness and the night engulf him. Maybe he could be swallowed up, just like her.

Dark thoughts. Ones he doesn't like. But nothing can go back to the way it was. That's what Hopper says, anyways.

Inside, something shuffles. Mike starts at the noise, turning around and peering through the thin white curtain.

Within, he can just discern the faint outline of his mom. It doesn't surprise him, seeing as she's always doing laundry down there. But it's a little late, right?

His watch reads 12:01.

She'll be pissed, but it's freezing out here, and now that reality has a little more control over him (*you can't just let yourself get swallowed up, there's other things to live for, right?*), Mike decides to take the risk and just go inside.

He kicks off his shoes, even though he didn't walk in the snow. She's alerted of his presence, though.

She's not doing laundry.

His mom is sitting on the ratty old couch. When she looks up at him, surprised and a little startled, he sees that her eyes are rimmed with red, wet with tears.

"Mom?"

"Michael," she stands quickly, brushing off her skirt. "What on earth are you doing up so late?"

"Are you okay?"

She wipes her eyes. "That's not an answer to my question," she says, and then softens when she catches the way he almost flinches. "I'm fine, sweetie."

He shrugs. "I fell asleep down here."

His mom rolls her eyes. "What were you doing outside, in the cold?"

"Nothing."

"Mike..."

That's a warning tone, and it breaks the back of his neck out in goosebumps even if he didn't do anything wrong. "Really," he says, "I just wanted air."

His mom studies him. She likes to think she knows when they're lying, but if anything, last month just proved she was as gullible as the next suburban mother. Or maybe... she just knows when not to push.

"You should go on up to bed," she says, trying for a patient smile. "It's very late."

"Yeah, um..." Mike shifts from foot to foot, glancing at the blanket fort in the corner. El wouldn't be up so late anyway, right? No matter where she might be.

(gone)

Not gone. She can't be. Not really. Just lost.

"Goodnight, Mom."

She inhales sharply, like she hadn't expected it. "Goodnight, Mike."

Goodbye, Mike.

He stops walking, hand on the railing of the stairs, foot on the first one. "Mom?"

"Yes?"

There's something like hope in her tone. Desperation. A heartbeat of silence before he turns, the tears already prickling at the corners of his eyes. They sting, they're like open wounds. Most nights, no one sees them. They go unnoticed and unheard, right into his pillow.

Tonight, his mom sees them. All of the weight drops from her shoulders just as it does his.

They meet in the middle. Her arms are open. She smells like expensive perfume, like home. Her hugs still feel the same as they did when he was a lot smaller; after cuts and scraps and bruises, after

bullies, after fights.

This wound can't be healed by her love. It can't be healed by anything. It'll just gape, exposed. It'll fester.

Mike cries. His knees feel weak. He doesn't know if his heart is even beating. He's so afraid she might speak, might ask why he's upset.

He's not supposed to be hurting anymore. Everyone else has moved on; no one talks about El. They live, they laugh, they act like she never existed. The minute they'd all signed those documents it was like that week had never even happened.

But Mike can't live like that. How much longer can he go on for?

His mom hugs him back, kisses his head, does all the things she's supposed to do. She whispers that it'll be okay, and that he can talk to her.

Mike doesn't want to talk.

He wants El back.

At half past eleven, Nancy Wheeler ducks into her bedroom. It's cold in here, and dark. She wonders absentmindedly if this'll be what it looks like when she finally goes off to college; like a ghost lives in it. Like some dead girl's room, whose parents don't want to pack away her things just yet.

Like Barb's room.

Determined not to think too much, Nancy flicks on the light. It fills up the room, stretching to every corner, casting away the shadows.

Her bed. Her pillows. Her Tom Cruise poster. It's all so typical, so picturesque. Not a belonging out of place, not a wrinkle in the sheets. There's no monsters here, there's no danger.

That's what Hawkins looks like. Nice people, boring gossip. But underneath it, underneath all that *bullshit*, there's the truth.

And it'll never be exploited.

She's bitter, now, and she knows that. Bitter but successful at hiding it. She does the good girl stuff; goes on dates with her boyfriend, helps her mother with the chores, does her homework and does it well.

But Nancy isn't a good girl. She knows what it feels like to have the warm wooden grip of a pistol in her hands. She knows what it feels like to be covered in inter-dimensional *waste*. She knows what it feels like to lose someone, and to lie about it every fucking day.

Nancy kicks off her shoes and closes her window to block out the chill. She closes her curtains, too. She doesn't need to see the lie of Hawkins, and if she could, she'd escape the one in her bedroom, too.

If she could, she'd escape herself.

Quietly, she takes off her jacket and slips into the bathroom.

The faucet runs, and runs, and runs. Nancy washes off her makeup. She pulls her hair out of its style, wetting the spots where she'd applied spray. She brushes her teeth. She tries very hard not to cry when she looks at herself and sees the truth. Sees the bare girl, the one who's best friend died, the one who collapsed onto the body of another teenage boy, horrified and gasping, shivering.

Nancy looks down at her palm. There's a scar, there; prominent and white. He has one too.

Jonathan Byers. The boy who was always there, looming in so many of even her earliest memories. Jonathan Byers who started showing up to middle school with unexplainable bruises. Jonathan Byers who was damaged and broken from almost the very start. He's nothing like her.

But that night, in her bed, she'd listened—*close*. She'd needed something to stave off the fear gnawing at her insides.

His heart beat right along with hers. Maybe they were scared into alignment, or maybe it had always been that way.

And it makes her feel something she doesn't *want* to feel. It makes her feel something she has to bury deep down, right next to Barb. She doesn't talk about it, doesn't think about it. Refuses to even acknowledge it.

Instead she lets Steve become what guides her orbit. Steve, with his dorky jokes and lingering kisses. Steve who makes her chest spark, who makes her laugh. He's not what he seems. He's good, he's kind.

There's another layer to him that not so many people get to see. There's love buried under all that suave indifference. So much of it. Love for her, mostly. She thinks maybe she's the only person he's ever really cared about this much—given how absent his parents are, and how his old friends had treated him.

It's a little selfish, but she thinks that if she were ever to leave him, he wouldn't last. He wouldn't be happy. He'd never claw himself back up from the dark hole heartbreak throws you in.

Nancy flicks off the bathroom light.

The leaves shift in a slight breeze—the same one that makes the porch swing *creak, groan, creak, groan*. Mike's eyes scan the road for any sign. It's all he can do, in the meantime.

He's still covered in dirt and slime, but it doesn't matter. He's still a little broken, but it doesn't matter.

Maybe they've lost. Mike doesn't know yet; all he knows is how the headlights on the Camaro had brightened so much they'd nearly blinded him. All he knows is the empty pit in his stomach, and the fear that keeps his heart rate elevated so much his veins feel like they might burst out of his neck.

Inside, the others are arguing; about Steve, and Billy, and what to do. Mike can't bring himself to focus on any of that. They'll figure it out.

There, something shifts; dirt rising, circling. The sound of an engine meets his ears, soon followed by the lights of Jonathan's car.

Mike slams one fist into the front door of the Byers home, just to get

the party's attention, before rushing down the rickety steps.

The passenger door opens first. Nancy slips out, drenched in sweat with her hair plastered to her brow. The bottom falls out of Mike's stomach.

"Nance..."

He doesn't know what to say. He doesn't know how to patch up this chasm that's formed between them in the last year; the one founded on *no more secrets*.

Do you like Jonathan?

Do you like Eleven?

They'd both been lying.

Nancy doesn't speak, though. She just rushes toward him, gathering him in her arms. Mike lets her. He hugs her back, and tightly. She could have *died*. They *both* could have died.

"I'm sorry," she whispers, clutching the back of his jacket. "I'm *sorry*, Mike."

"It's okay," he says, even though it's not. He's completely breathless; she'd knocked the wind out of him with the impact of her body slamming into his own.

A thousand possibilities run through his mind, for *I'm sorry. Is Will okay? Had Hopper radioed about Eleven? Has he really lost her again?*

But then, he never had, had he? All that time, that electricity buzzing in the peripheral, that had been *her*. Every night, she'd filled the negative space in that fort. She'd listened, she'd *heard*.

Not gone, not even lost. Just hiding.

And he can still feel her; a pulsating presence, reverberating through him. She's channelling him.

Nancy pulls back. Her cheeks are glistening with sweat and tears. "I

don't ever want to see you like that," she breathes. "I love you so much, okay? Do you know that?"

"Nance," he can feel his throat starting to close up, "I know, okay? I know."

Then they're hugging again. They're making up for lost time, he guesses.

The others are all filing out of the house or the beat up car. Will—limp and asleep—is in Jonathan's arms. Max and Lucas are holding hands. Steve looks like shit.

The minute Nancy takes notice of that, she rips away from him. "What the hell happened?"

Steve is so bruised just looking at him makes her wince. The kids had done an awful job of patching him up.

Nancy is almost sure he doesn't have a concussion.

She's no expert, but he seems lucid enough. Just hurt. Every movement seems to make him wince.

It's okay, Nance.

He keeps saying that, over and over. But it's not okay. Even if she wants it to be. She can't keep lying to herself all the time.

It's not okay. She hurt him. All he ever did was try to help; to make it go away. He just wanted to make her happy, and what had she done in return?

So Nancy stays. She holds ice to his face while Jonathan and Mrs. Byers get Will settled in his bedroom. Fresh sheets, curtained windows.

The kids rip the papers off the walls and floors. Someone gathers the contents from the fridge and puts them in an ice chest. Nancy has no idea what *that's* about.

She watches all of this commotion—watches her brother bicker with his friends; temper short and *everyone* knows why. They follow his lead, though, and it's weird to see. It's weird to see how much he's grown up without her noticing.

Steve shifts. "You know, my arms aren't broken, Nance."

"Just let me do this," Nancy pleads. "Please, Steve?"

He studies her through those swollen eyelids, intelligent in a way he'll never give himself credit for. He's almost more emotionally perceptive than her, sometimes. "You don't owe me anything."

"Steve..."

"You don't," he grabs the ice pack, holding it to his forehead. "It's okay, Nancy."

"Stop saying that."

"I mean it."

"You *don't*," she knows that much. Maybe he really, really wants to. It's *almost* convincing.

"Just go help Byers, okay?"

Half of her molecular makeup is screaming for her to get up and go; to do as he says. But the other half is glued here, to him. It's not just sentiment that holds her here, either. It's not just obligation or guilt. It's Steve, strong and brave and honest.

"You're not bullshit," she whispers at last. "It wasn't bullshit."

Something like hope sparks. "Then what was it?"

Not a mistake. Not bad. It had been good, for the most part. So, so good.

"I don't know," she confesses, because she really doesn't. It wasn't love, was it? It wasn't (flames dancing across her skin at his touch, breathless, constantly needing more and going limp when she got it)

like Jonathan.

That hope shatters in a millisecond. Steve shifts, almost defensive. “Well let me know when you do.”

What if she never does?

He hears the screech of the brakes and tires on gravel before he sees the car, but he knows it's them. It can't be anyone else.

Mike drops the stack of papers in his hands, careless when they scatter across the floor. He moves without thinking, breathes without perception. His feet carry him out the door, down the steps. Night air slaps him in the face just as Hopper slips out of the Blazer.

The chief hurries around to the other side, popping the door open. There's some murmured conversation (*can you walk? yes*), and then—

—then his heart stops. Like actually stops, right in that moment. The bottom drops out of his stomach, his hair stands on end. Here, alive, safe.

Eleven. El.

She takes shaky steps toward him, refusing Hopper's offer of support. Then she's right in front of him, smiling while tears spill down her cheeks.

He can't believe he missed her more in the last two hours than he had during those 353 days. Maybe it came along with knowing she was really out there, yearning to be close.

“Hey,” Mike grabs her hand. Their fingers twine together, naturally and perfectly. “Are you okay?”

“Tired,” El sniffs. “Good.”

“What took you guys so long?” Dustin asks. They're all on the porch in a huddle, shivering against the cold.

“Doc... Owens,” El enunciates slowly. “Hospital.”

“He was bleeding a hell of a lot,” Hopper tells Mike. “Said he’d need stitches.”

“But he’ll live, right?”

“Yeah,” Hopper wipes his mouth. “He’ll live. Where’s Joyce?”

“The back,” Lucas pipes up. “With Will.”

Almost as one collective being—the party—they all sort of head in that direction. Will looks the same as he did ten minutes ago; asleep, sallow—the veins stick out against his skin so starkly it’s disturbing.

“Out, all of you,” Hopper orders. “Kid needs space, alright? El, why don’t you go eat or—”

“No.”

El squeezes Mike’s hand. She’s staring straight at Will, eyes dark. She looks so exhausted, Mike almost backs Hopper up—but it wouldn’t do any good.

Joyce and Hopper exchange weary glances. Mike gently guides El further into the room as the others retreat, muttering *thank god*, and *where’s something to eat?*

“I’m staying,” El says. “With Will.”

Hopper shakes his head. “Yeah, okay. Ten minutes,” he comes up and kisses the side of her head. It’s so unexpected Mike actually blinks. “Then you shower, okay? You smell.”

El punches his shoulder. “You smell too.”

Hopper looms for another minute or so, eyes on Joyce, who nods almost imperceptibly. Then he stalks out.

They kneel by Will’s bed. El puts her head on Mike’s shoulder. The weight—her presence—sends an electric thrill down his spine. He could fall asleep like this, wake up like this. Spend forever like this.

The next morning, they sneak in through the back door.

Their dad is asleep in the Lay-Z-Boy, not even reclined all the way. The house is dead silent; there's no breakfast on the table, no other signs of life.

Nancy exchanges a weary glance with Mike. God, he looks like shit; bags under his eyes, pale, deprived. She wonders if he even slept last night, or if he just stayed up mooning over El.

Nancy had tossed and turned in Joyce's bed, next to Max—the red headed new girl who conked out as soon as her head hit the pillow.

She'd contemplated going to Jonathan's room, but how shitty would that be to Steve? Two days after breaking up with him?

Or maybe only hours after. She doesn't know which.

"Think mom's upstairs?" Mike throws out.

"Maybe," Nancy lets her bag fall from her shoulder.

Mike chews his lip. "Eggs sound good?"

"Yeah," Nancy smiles. "I'll make toast."

They go about their business, mentally preparing themselves for the inevitable lecture that's to come, moving through the kitchen with ease.

Longing, still, for people. But this time the longing is easier fulfilled.

Author's Note:

what was this even? idk

it's definitely not an update for my mileven series
DUDE I'M SO SORRY IF ANYONE IS SUBSCRIBED
AND GOT A NOTIF AND THOUGHT IT WAS THAT
OMG

I suck, yikes! I honestly have no idea where this

came from, I just felt guilty for not writing anything today and then all the sudden I had 3k about Nancy and Mike being depressed.

Oops?